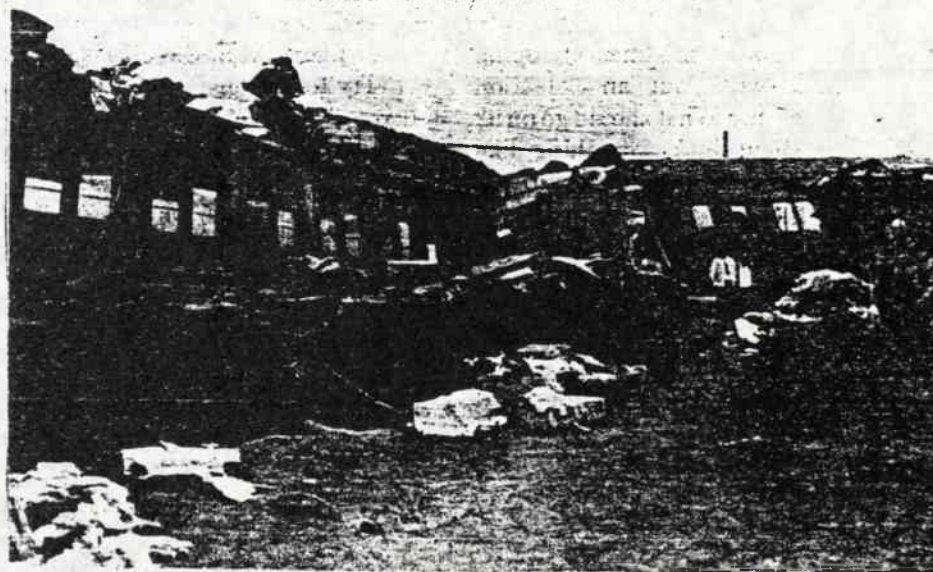




1944 Train Wreck Kills 29

by Judy Stedman Calvert

Northside Journal 9-7-82

Tragedy struck near North Terre Haute on September 14, 1944 at Dewey (25th and Haythorne) when two C. and E.I. trains collided head-on in a dense fog.

A northbound express mail train (Engine # 1011 and 15 cars) had stopped as indicated by the signal at about 2:18 a.m. Two minutes later it was struck by a passenger train (Engine # 1019 and 14 cars) going about 35 miles an hour.

The final toll of the accident was 29 dead (26 passengers and 3 railroad employees) and 42 injured (32 passengers and 10 railroad employees).

Most of the dead and injured passengers were members of the Army Air Force enroute to Miami from Chicago for rest after having served overseas during the war.

Ralph W. Smith of North Terre Haute was just returning home from work at the Dresser mine when the wreck occurred. He heard the crash and

ran down to the scene. Lights from the coaches were still on and he could see what had happened. Accompanied by a young serviceman Ralph ran back home to call the sheriff and ambulances before returning to the wreck to help with the injured.

The official accident report indicates that the cause of the accident was "failure to obey meet order and to control speed of train in conformity with automatic block-signal indications." The passenger train was 37 minutes behind schedule and was supposed to stop at Atherton and enter a siding until the mail train passed. The fireman and engineer were killed in the accident and it was never determined why the train did not stop at Atherton as instructed in orders received in Clinton. It was speculated that because of heavy fog and the darkness, the engineer was not aware he had passed Atherton.

Photos Courtesy Vigo County Historical Society